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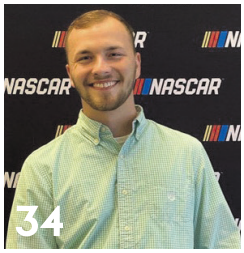
Photo courtesy of Carolyn Germaine



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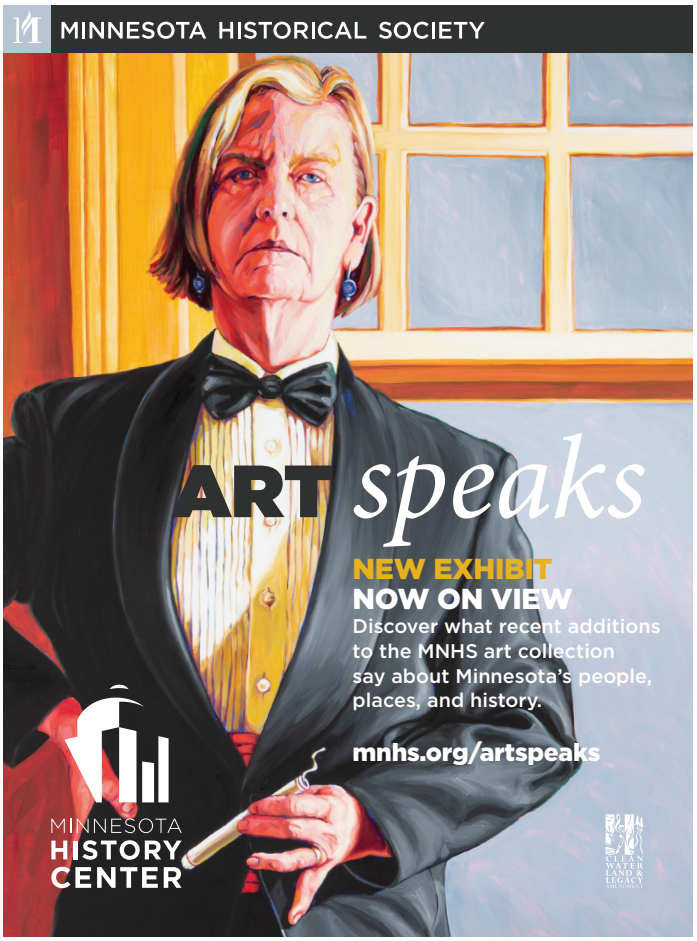
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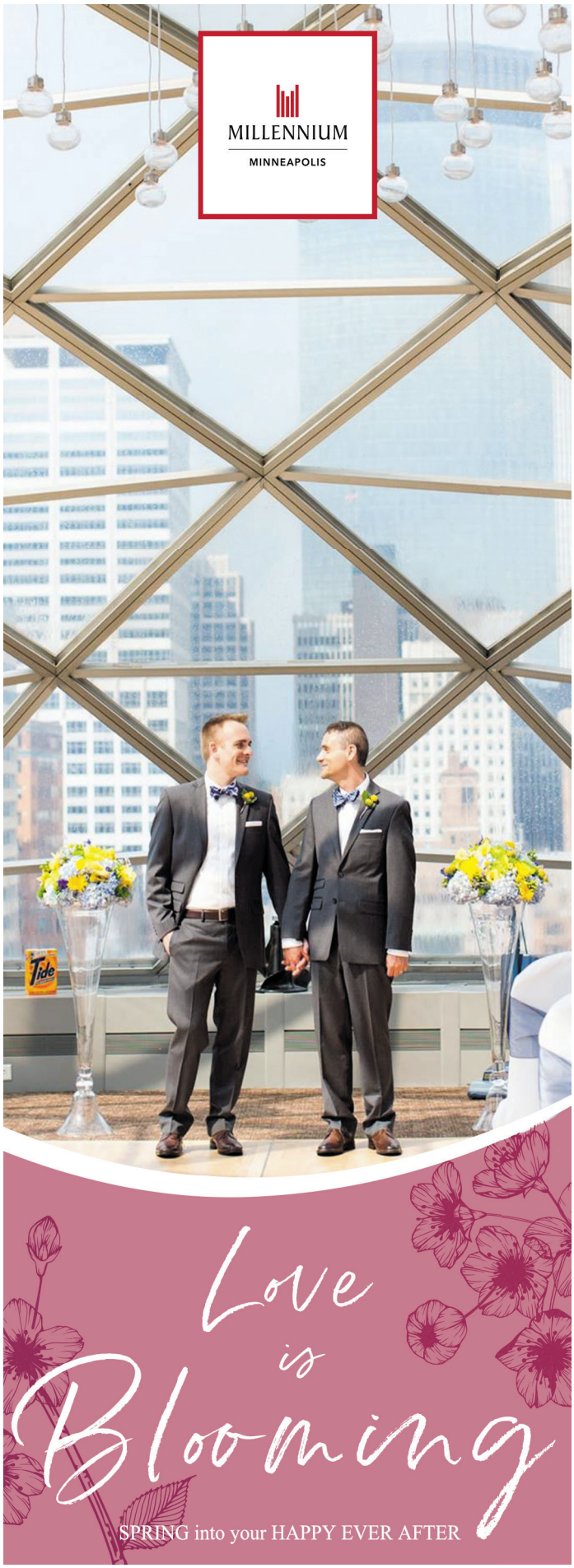
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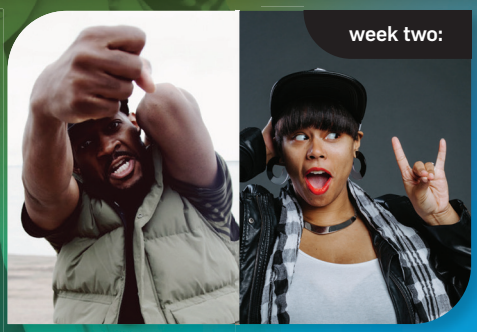

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Let Me Introduce Myself...

BY RANDY STERN

It is my great honor to introduce myself as the new Managing Editor of *Lavender* Magazine.

You may have read my work over the past 11 years on here. My automotive, transportation, and travel columns were written for you. No matter what you took away from my columns, I hope you enjoyed them on these pages.

However, the opportunity came to take a greater role in leading this magazine. That is a responsibility I take seriously. This community is something I felt in kinship with. It continues to thrive on various different levels.

What about me? My first media job was at a small Bear/Leather website out of Chicago as their Managing Editor. That was 21 years ago. Without diving deep into my resume, I have been an automotive journalist and content creator for the last 11 years – including writing the same subject matter for this magazine.

You probably guess that I am not a native Minnesotan. Although, I have been a resident of this state since 2004. If you were wondering, I was born in Southern California – Encino, to be exact. Legally, the City of Los Angeles. Again, I will not take you on my life's journey recounting everywhere I've roamed. I'd rather not bore you with that.

At this point, I cannot divulge too much what *Lavender* will look like under my editorial leadership. For the most part, it will stay the course content-wise – sticking with per-issue themes, a big annual Pride issue, and so forth.

However, I see opportunities that should enhance the magazine's reach and continue to serve ALL communities – including BIPOC, Transgender, LGBTQ Youth and younger generations, everybody within and outside the LGBTQ spectrum, communities outstate and across state lines! I want this magazine to embrace all ages, races, ethnicities, nationalities, gender identities, sexual orientations, economic status', and so forth.

This magazine is emboldened with a great staff as diverse as our community. We are storytellers, journalists, reviewers, patrons, and so forth. We're probably next door to you. You might see us out there talking to you wherever we roam.

This magazine always starts with a conversation. That's where most stories on these pages start. Let's have one soon! Let us tell your story!

Rest assured, you will continue to see my byline elsewhere on these pages. I am already committed to several stories for future issues. However, I will be taking on more subject matter in future issues.

My call to action is with you. Please continue to read this magazine. Patronize our advertisers. If you like something that interests you, pursue it!

Since this is our Love and Marriage issue, thank you for showing us what love looks like today! We have some wonderful couples featured in these pages. Plus, there are some great ideas to make your special day the best day ever! Even if it's your first date!

In other words, let's get ready to run! ∎

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How Is It That...

BY E.B. BOATNER

"The things I saw beggar description…The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick…I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in a position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to "propaganda." D. Eisenhower, 12 April, 1945

Thus did Dwight D. Eisenhower, then Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, following a tour of Ohrdruf prison camp with Generals George S. Patton and Omar Bradley, cable General George C. Marshall, head of the Joint Chiefs of Staffs in Washington, D.C.

Eisenhower cabled again April 19, requesting Marshall to bring members of Congress and journalists to the camps to bear witness to the atrocities and to convey their on-site observations to the American public.

Buchenwald, of which Ohrdruf was a subcamp, was liberated a week later by US soldiers who went on to liberate Dora-Mittelbau (11 April), Flossenbürg (April 23), Dachau (April 29), and Mauthausen (May 5).

Soviet troops preceded the Americans, reaching Majdanek, near Lublin, Poland, in July 1944, later liberating Auschwitz, the largest killing center, in January 1945, then moving on to camps in the Baltic states, Poland, and Germany. The British, in April-May, 1945, cleared yet more, including Bergen-Belsen and Neuengamme. At Ike's summons, US observers arrived; they saw the unimaginable, they bore witness.

Others recorded on film, in ghastly detail, hoping to instruct and warn future generations. The U.S. Signal Corps photographed, the U.S. Army distributed an illustrated pamphlet throughout Germany that "ordinary citizens" might see, Wilhelm Brasse, Polish professional photographer and Auschwitz prisoner took thousands of images, as did the intrepid American, Margaret Bourke-White.

General, later President, Eisenhower would not then likely envision future Americans insisting, "Nope, it was never that bad," or worse, "It never happened." Misinformation and lies are abroad today, denying the Holocaust and other evils.

The massacre of twenty first-graders and six adults in Newtown, CT, spawned outlandish conspiracy theories and outright lies. The most vocal of the pack has been Alex Jones, who over the past decade insisted the massacre simply didn't happen, that the "victims" and "families" were actors in a government scheme.

Jones, of *Infowars*, peddles fear, hatred, and lucrative supplementals–"Super Male Vitality" (a testosterone booster); "Brain Force Plus" (supercharges cognitive function)– which rake in tens of millions annually. America has always been home to liars and hucksters, swindlers and snake oil salesmen, who in a growing country with sparse lines of communication could live comfortably–if they knew when to hit the road. Con artist Harold Hill offers a sunny side of this dark profession in the beloved, five-Tony- Award-winning show, *The Music Man*.

But how, to return to my title question, in this info-riddled country of today, can one not take a moment to Google any questionable subject? How can one not think, "Twenty child actors "playing dead?" or not consider, "How many victims could have been held in just a few camps?" without checking to learn there were well over a thousand. More knowledge at our fingertips than in all of human history, yet many don't deign to question.

"You can sway a thousand men by appealing to their prejudices quicker than you can convince one man by logic," wrote author Robert A. Heinlein. Was he correct? ▮

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Creekside Supper Club

Your Relish Tray Is Shrimp Cocktailing My Old Fashioned

BY CARLA WALDEMAR | PHOTOS COURTESY OF CREEKSIDE SUPPER CLUB

Creekside is one of those beloved vintage supper clubs that populate small-town Wisconsin—except this one resides in South Minneapolis, where it debuted on Chicago Avenue way back in 2021. And—let's be clear about one thing, from the start of this story—I love it. I love it because it feels authentic, paying homage to the art form without slipping into a wink-wink parody.

Let's start with the décor (a word, however, not regularly on the tongue of any founder of such an enterprise). Creekside hits all the right buttons, from knotty-pine walls affixed with a mishmash of memorabilia (and a plate rail, of course) to its Port-colored carpet. (Usually when renovating a building to open a club, one removes the ratty carpet. This time, they installed one.)

Captains' chairs on casters are upholstered in classic, brass-studded burgundy. Tables are laid with those dive-bar red hurricane candleholders and water glasses that look like they came from a long-closed lunch counter. The only thing lacking, I said to my companion on our way out, is a cigarette machine.

Then we spotted it. (Chesterfields, anyone?)

What makes a supper club a supper club? The ambience. The menu. The drinks. We each ordered an Old Fashioned, as any Wisconsonite over a certain age is wont to do. Choose the state's iconic brandy version, or cheat a little—we did—and go with the Maker's Mark alternative. Gimlets, Gibsons, and Whiskey Sours are listed too. And if you're into Nostalgia (it merits its own section of the Drinks menu), a glass of Mogen David red costs only $5—but that may be carrying a retreat to the Forties a little too far.

The appetizer list ($8-16) gambols from shrimp cocktail to onion rings to popovers, but hold on: Even before you order, your classic supper club appetizer arrives, compliments of the house. It's—natch—a relish tray bouncing with crisp veggies and a sour cream dip. (But where are those saltines in cellophane?) Then choose soup or salad as the included starter for your entrée. The kitchen's roasted-corn and potato chowder hit the spot—thick and comforting—while the perky house salad proved bounteous. If you choose the "French" dressing (what else? Olive oil had yet to leave Italy), it's….orange. Ask for a mix-in side of blue cheese to prove you're in the know.

Or perhaps you prefer the reliable Iceberg wedge? Go for it. Or you could order the cottage cheese. (Did anybody, ever?)

Then on to the Steaks & Chops, ranging from sirloin ($26) to ribeye ($39), from bone-in pork chops ($26) to prime rib, my choice (a Queen cut for $28): half an inch thick, shorn of excess fat, and cooked medium-rare as requested. My friend's eye wandered to the seafood side of the list: $17 for a fish fry, $36 for crab-stuffed walleye with lemon beurre blanc and carrot

Continue on page 12

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and almond salad—which sounds both yummy and not at home in a place with knotty pine paneling. Instead—authenticity prevails!—he chose the beer-battered fried shrimp ($24), an overflowing stack of pleasingly plump and sweet-tasting critters lightly dressed in batter voluminous as a Minnesotan's winter jacket.

Entrees come with one's choice of side, and I chose the au gratins. The sizzling cubes of potato came crowned with the promised cheese (but not much of it), while my friend's hashed browns proved winsomely grease-free and delicious.

Dessert? Our lovely server recited a few choices, but we did what every diner around us did—summoned Brandy Alexanders ($8). They came in a huge ice-cream-soda glass: Fine with me! Or choose a Grasshopper or Golden Cadillac.

Those were the days, my friend; we thought they'd never end…. And they didn't. They're alive and well as Creekside, praise be. It's like coming in from the cold. ▮

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Love and Marriage with Mike Augustyniak and Eric Henderson

BY CONLAN CARTER | PHOTO BY ERIC MUELLER

Like many modern married couples (one in ten, to be precise), Mike Augustyniak and Eric Henderson met at work. Specifically, on Mike's first day in the WCCO Minneapolis office. He was visiting WCCO to interview for the then-vacant Director of Meteorology position. "It was kind of like an instant crush on my part," Eric admits with a short laugh "I saw [Mike] enter the room, and I thought 'well, I hope they hire him.'"

Years later, the two would transition from coworkers to friends to husbands, but for their first actual introduction, Eric (then a WCCO Web Producer, now Web Content Manager) wanted to make the moment really last. As a new hire, Mike needed his photo and bio taken for the WCCO website, and, coincidentally, Eric was the photographer. What would normally be a quick, five-minute process transformed into the couple's first official meet-cute, slyly orchestrated by Eric: "I took him to probably, I don't know, a dozen different places in the building with different backgrounds. I just tried to make it last as long as I could."

Despite Eric's efforts, however, the flirtatious elements were somewhat lost on Mike. "There's a history here of me–I'm such a literal person," Mike explains, "and such a science mind that unless you hit me over the head with something, I'm probably not going to understand the subtext of it." As the new Director of Meteorology, he had other things on his mind, and making a good professional impression was one of them. But what's clear about this meeting was that the two of them could not only work well together, they could have fun while doing it. "I remember specifically . . . we were both goofing around where I was, like, lying on a couch doing one of these things," Mike tosses his forearm to his head as if he were about to faint as he describes the extended photoshoot.

Like many recently-married couples, Mike and Eric were faced with the inevitable decision of what to do with their wedding plans when the pandemic struck. While the original plan involved multiple receptions–

one in New York and one in Minneapolis–the rearranging of which would be a standard wedding planning headache, one of the more manageable elements was the wedding ceremony itself. "The wedding was always going to be a small, family affair, the actual ceremony," Mike clarifies, "the only thing that changed because of COVID was the location of that." What was originally planned as a week at Martha's Vineyard (a favorite vacation haunt from Mike's New York social circle) became a Thursday wedding in Minneapolis' Gold Medal Park, a much more public venue that came with its own perks.

"It was fun to sort of tip off our own wedding crashers," Eric reminisces about the added benefit of placing the small ceremony in a centralized location, "to let them know, 'Hey, [you may not be] officially invited to the wedding, but if you happen to be in the park between these two times, you might see us get married there." Those of us reading who have attended a wedding in a public park (or any outdoor wedding) before know that there's always some small element of chaos when planning a wedding open to the, well, elements.

Luckily for Eric and Mike, a handful of picnicking park-goers got the hint from the official-seeming wedding photographers and graciously scooted over, but not before causing some confusion for the arriving wedding party. "We didn't reserve [the park]" Mike begins to describe his rising stress upon arriving at the venue, "I was pissed because it was a Thursday night and we're walking to the top of the hill, and I'm like 'is somebody else having a wedding on a Thursday night? I am not a bridezilla, but my mind went to the worst possible place."

What Mike assumed was another wedding party was a mix between park-goers and their own wedding photographers, and once the ceremony started, everything went according to plan (including a dinner at Spoon and Stable–a restaurant also listed as a favorite on Mike's WCCO bio page).

One relocated ceremony and two receptions later, Eric and Mike have a few pieces of advice for couples looking to plan a wedding with a global pandemic in mind. "If you can be psychic," Eric jokes, "and know that your biggest reception in Minneapolis just happens to fall after the vaccinations have taken hold and we all think we're going to be out of the COVID pandemic . . . that's what you need to do."

But as a piece of advice, there's some truth to this: thinking about the last couple years of the pandemic, timing (and the willingness to be flexible with the timing) of wedding-related events seems to be key to success. And to those of us who sweat at the idea of planning two receptions, let alone ones that aren't all on the same day or venue as the ceremony itself, Mike's advice is to "split it up, so you don't cram all of the exciting, fun, stressful parts into one, 24-hour period." Because if you only get one wedding, according to Mike, "Why would you not want to spread out the love and the enjoyment and give yourself a little bit of breathing room?"

When asked about if life as newlyweds has changed their relationship, Mike and Eric had an immediate answer:

***Lavender* Magazine: Do things feel different from when you started dating?**

Eric: (Laughs) No.

Mike: No. I'll lean to the fact that we're, uh, "gay old." (Laughs)

Eric: We're old old now.

Mike: When you get married in your early forties, I think most people have a much better sense of who they are and what they're interested in than–certainly I can speak for myself–than I did when I was in my twenties. So, no, I mean, now we're getting to the good part of the relationship where we do just get to sit on the couch together and watch Netflix and call that a fun night.

Eric: Some of our coworkers who maybe without knowing, knew that we should probably should end up together. They used to refer to us as an old married couple, even when we were friends.

Dating as coworkers, too, has proven to be its own challenge for Mike and Eric, who describe the experience as "complicated" when it comes to managing your partner's stress about a workplace and coworkers that you both share. Additional advice for those considering an office romance is being "work friends first" and trying your best to make sure, when having important conversations, to "make sure your home life and your work life are two separate zones as much as possible."

And on the subject of relationship advice, sans-work dramas, Eric and Mike have a few takeaways for newer couples. "The money and time I've spent with a therapist has probably been the number one factor in getting me to a point where I am a good partner," Mike says, naming his key to relationship success as a self-described Type-A person, "to understand where other people are coming from, both in relationships at work, but also relationships of the heart."

For Eric, the advice is a bit more straightforward. "Know when to let your partner choose the music," he mentions, while Mike laughs knowingly, "sometimes you just need to know when the other person needs to be in their happy space." (Speaking from this writer's personal experience, Björk can be a polarizing music fave in certain gay circles, and this relationship is no different.) ▮

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Backyard Wedding Sites

From Gardens to Glass Houses

BY E.R. SHAFFER | PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAROLYN GERMAINE AND LOUISE NYQUIST

When two people decide to embark on a new life together, there's always cause for celebration. While media (both past and present) feeds us the idea of a grand wedding fit for royalty, the realities of hosting and paying for these kinds of events gives many couples pause. People want a day they will always remember, a day they set aside to celebrate their love with their family and friends—not necessarily one that'll put them thousands of dollars in debt. Enter the micro-wedding (also called a mini-mony), a new craze that helps couples find the balance between the elegant and the economical.

"We're not trying to be a small traditional venue," says Carolyn Germaine, Co-Founder of Backyard Wedding Sites, along with Louise Nyquist. "We're not talking about repeating all the pieces of a big wedding. We're just going to do a ceremony—you might have champagne and cake afterward or you might bring in a caterer, if you have 40 people or more." The official standard for a micro-wedding is less than 50 people and gives the couple much more flexibility with the itinerary.

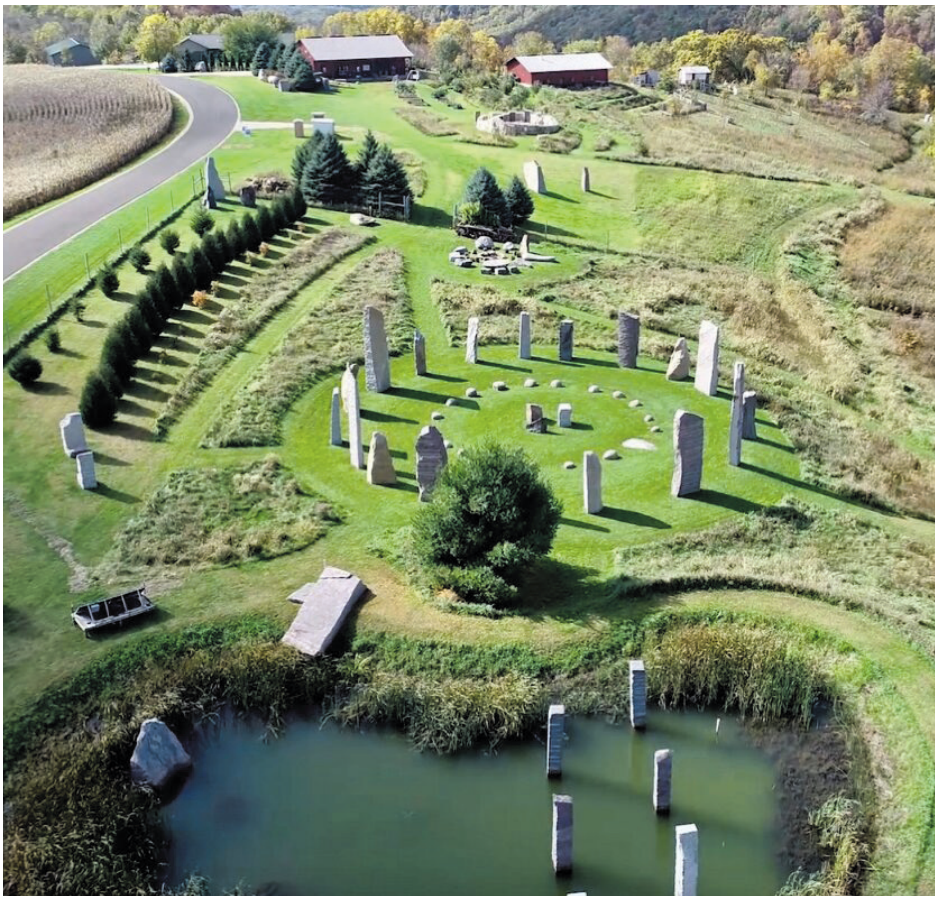
Think of BWS as a sort of Airbnb for private wedding venues, a service that connects like-minded couples with a site that fits their personalities, vision and budget. It started in 2019, when an engaged Germaine started looking for a private garden where they could throw a small wedding ceremony. She didn't want something overly traditional, but was still hoping for something more special and private than a public park. She figured somebody must've conceptualized this already, and that it'd be as simple as a Google search.

"I thought that list has to exist!" Germaine says. "And so I'm looking all over for it and, lo and behold, it doesn't exist." Fast forward: it's after the wedding, and she's contemplating this conundrum: How can couples seeking a non-traditional local wedding venues browse them on a user-friendly interface? Why doesn't this exist? And why couldn't she be the one to create it? While putting some feelers out to local gardeners, she met Louise Nyquist, who was immediately on board.

"There are people who are disenfranchised that need a place," Nyquist explains. "That's what we really wanted to rise to, is offer more places for smaller venues, for a smaller [carbon] footprint. So, people could really enjoy their company, the people that mean most to them."

For these two women, that environmental aspect is key.

According to Kate Harrison's *The Green Bride Guide: How to Create an Earth-Friendly Wedding on Any Budget*, the average nuptials creates about 400 pounds of garbage and 63 tons of CO2. When you consider that approximately 2.5 million weddings take place every year in the U.S., those numbers reach astronomical proportions. As longtime environmental advocates, Germaine and Nyquist wanted to create a company that did its part to decrease those impacts. And so BWS was born, which offers both green and Covid-conscious wedding experiences.



"There are people who are going to want larger weddings, medium-sized weddings and smaller weddings," Carolyn concedes. "We just recognize that we're filling a void between public weddings and traditional venues."

The world and its goods and services are changing. For those of us looking for more unique, fun and oft-budget-friendly lodgings, we have services like Airbnb and Hipcamp. Same goes for BWS, which caters to the creative and environmentally conscious set. Not to mention those non-traditional couples looking for a totally inclusive venue: "We embrace weddings of all race, religion and sexual orientation," adds Germaine. ∎

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Real Couples

BY LINDA RAINES

Nikki & Whitney Graf

Photo courtesy of Nikki Graf

When and how'd you meet?

We met playing football for the Minnesota Vixen. Nikki was a linebacker and Whitney was a defensive back. For the longest time we didn't know each other existed, and the times we did get a chance to talk it was so awkward! One time (Nikki) I had bronchitis and my throat was killing me, and Whitney was trying so hard to hold a conversation with me. Another time, Nikki was trying to talk to me and she was so nervous and the only thing she could talk about was grapes. She just went on and on about how much she liked them.. It was adorable but excruciating for both of us. Eventually, our paths crossed correctly and so did the conversation.

What do you love most about your partner?

Whitney: Nikki is the kindest, most giving person I have ever met. She is always doing so much for me, our family, and our community. She also is the easiest person to get along with.

Nikki: Oh gosh, this question is so hard because there are so many things! If I could pick one thing it is my wife's authenticity. I have never met a person who is 1000% herself in all situations. She comes in every room as a kind, caring, and calming person. When she isn't doing that, then she is weird, hilarious, and curious. She takes her space confidently and it's one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen (and quite frankly, try to learn from).

What's one quirk you've had to get used to?

Whitney: I'm not sure if this is a quirk, but her bubbly, outgoing, fearless nature is something I definitely had to get used to. I tend to be more reserved and introverted, and she is the exact opposite. Because of this, she is ALWAYS getting us to do things I would never actively do without her (like this interview ?). She has really helped me out of my comfort zone and given me so many experiences I wouldn't have had on my own.

Nikki: Oh this one is fun! My wife has a really great internal dialogue. So much so that, in the middle of chatting with herself she will offer to include me. It is really common for her to be deep in thought and then look at me and say, "don't you agree?" or "what do you think?". Sometimes I can guess what might have been going on her mind, but often I can only respond with a blank stare.

Read more online at LavenderMagazine.com

Jacob Yates & Audie Howe

Photo courtesy of Jacob Yates

When and how'd you meet?

Jake: We met online when Audie said "Hi" and talked online for weeks before we met in person at the Pride Parade in Minneapolis in June of 2011.

Audie: June 2011. We met the old-fashioned way…..online. I just had to say "Hello" and that's all it took.

What do you love most about your partner?

Jake: How thoughtful and generous he is. Audie always has me at the forefront of his thinking and will do anything for me.

Audie: I love that Jake's a dreamer. He has always dreamed BIG in his life.

What's one quirk you've had to get used to?

Jake: His lack of filter. Audie says what's on his mind no matter what, which is probably a good thing, but something I'm not good at and don't always deal with well.

Audie: His lack of patience!

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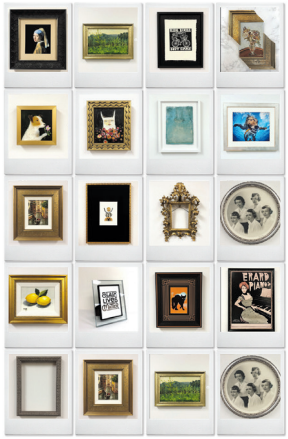

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Jordan Tyler Greenslit & Kamaree Williams

Photo by Ryan Coit Photography

When and how did you meet?

We met on October 17th 2016 at what used to be called The Townhouse Bar, which now is called The Black Hart in St. Paul, MN. My good friend Tyler T. Love talked me into doing a amateur contest that evening at the very last second. Once we arrived, we took our drag bags downstairs and into the dressing room. Once we turned the corner to get into the room, I saw this young and beautiful queen sitting and painting in this room all by herself. I remember instantly I was nervous and my shy side kicked in. Tyler and I walked in and sat our bags down while Tyler and Kamaree were saying hello. Without a second to breathe after saying hi, Kamaree turns, looks at me and says "who's your friend?' We introduced ourselves and her next question was "when are you taking me out on a date?" As the night progressed we talked, we laughed, we flirted. I even won that night's competition. We took our first selfie that night and I captioned it "Future Wife" .

What do you love most about your partner?

To pick one thing is extremely hard! Her answer to this question however is that I helped give her the gift of motherhood.

What's one quirk you've had to get used to?

The fact that I can never scare her or pull a prank. I think I scared her one time and she almost knocked me out from her reflex! The thing she had to get used to with me is my sensitivity. She at times has a harder exterior and with time and my emotions, it has softened her.

Read more online at LavenderMagazine.com

Anthony Cook & Christopher Kohler

Photo courtesy of Anthony Cook

When and how'd you meet?

Anthony & Christopher: We originally met online around 2006. There was a spark and connection but the timing wasn't quite right. Fate brought us back together in 2010 when we found ourselves working out at the same gym. Shared physical activity interests, morphed into a friendship, which blossomed into romance, and transitioned into love. We married on May 26, 2018.

What do you love most about your partner?

Anthony: His energy and zest for life. He lives in the space of gratitude. He's courageous. He laughs generously. He loves his family fiercely. Life doesn't feel quite as heavy with my husband by my side supporting, encouraging, and occasionally carrying me.

Christopher: My husband is the most thoughtful, caring, kind, compassionate human being that I never imagined could exist in real life.

What's one quirk you've had to get used to?

Anthony: He sleeps with a full size body pillow and the blankets tucked under his chin. It's like having another person in the bed! Invariably, they both end up in the middle of the bed during the night with all of the blankets.

Christopher: His meticulousness and attention to detail. It came to a head over the folding of his t-shirts. I discovered he was re-folding all of his t-shirts after I finished folding them because he likes them folded a specific way. Crisp lines, wrinkle-free, sleeves folded in from left to right, finished off with a perfect square so they can be neatly stacked.

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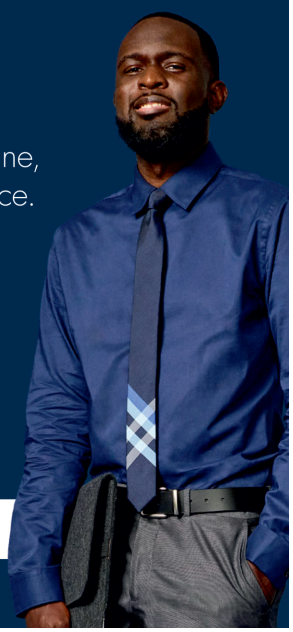

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Ryan & Paul McEnaney-Rodriguez

When and how'd you meet?

We met at an outdoor brewery festival 5 years ago, each attending with our own respective friends. We stayed in contact and, after a couple of months, decided to go on our first official date. From that day forward, we were inseparable and have now been married for 5 months.

What do you love most about your partner?

Ryan: Paul inspires me to live life to the fullest, to step back from work and embrace what really matters: time with family and friends. He is kind, thoughtful, sweet, and a "rock" that so many rely on.

Paul: I love Ryan's drive and motivation when it comes to almost anything. He works hard and helps push me to become better. Also, he's a really good cook.

What's one quirk you've had to get used to?

Ryan: I'm a night owl and Paul's a morning person, so adjusting to him waking up at 5:30 am every day and me tiptoeing to bed late each night has been a change.

Paul: We're both quite musical people, but a funny quirk is when Ryan's singing in the car or at home and just makes up random lyrics to songs.

Read more online at LavenderMagazine.com

Photo by Tracy Walsh

Janine Vesper & Kendra Curry

When and how'd you meet?

Janine: We first met in 1996? We worked for the same company and Kendra was on vacation with friends in Honolulu, where I worked. I was asked by a mutual co-worker to meet them for dinner. The whole group was great, but looking back, I feel like Kendra and I bonded in a different way, you know that energy. I think I thought I was just having a girl crush on a straight woman at the time. Fast forward to 1998, our paths crossed again through work in the MN and WI. We started dating, moved in together (in the stereo-typical lesbian tradition) We were married in in 2015.

Kendra: In 1996?…when my boss learned I was going to Hawaii for vacation with friends she told me I had to meet Janine. She was an incredible leader and fun person running a store and living on the island and I should let her know we were coming. Janine ended up hanging with us most anytime she wasn't working. I can't remember a vacation with more laughter, activities, and excitement! Several years later she ended up being my district manager and within about a year I worked up the courage to tell her I had feelings for her…and luckily, she acknowledged the same. I relatively quickly found a new company and role and moved to the Twin Cities…and we've been together since.

What do you love most about your partner?

Janine: The initial attraction was her bright energy and "anything is possible" way about her. Over the years, that still rings true, but through our evolution as a couple, I love what I have learned of the complexities in her nature. All dimensions, some of which are not all "bright and shiny," that it took me time to understand and value. And love that she willing shares all of that with me.

Kendra: I love that Janine has an incredible sense of humor, a loud laugh, a lightheartedness, as well as a drive to do good things at home, work, and through volunteering in our communities. And she is so caring and fierce in caretaker roles, most recently for her mom through strokes and dementia, and prior to that with me through cancer.

Photo courtesy of Janine Vesper

What's one quirk you've had to get used to?

Janine: We have VERY different purchasing habits. She loves, NEEDS, to research, contemplate, have choices on everything (big and small), so I have learned to be patient and let her process work through. In the beginning this would frustrate me…God, the time it would take to decide! But now I understand how it is going to happen and plan appropriately. I now ASK her to do the research! ?

Kendra: She said in our wedding vows she would turn off lights when she leaves a room, let's just say she's still working on that.

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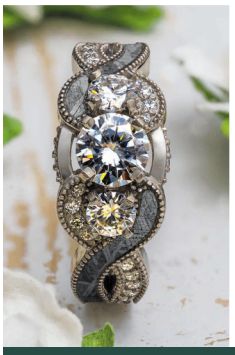

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Time After Time

New Gild Jeweler Jen Bellefleur Makes New Love Old Again

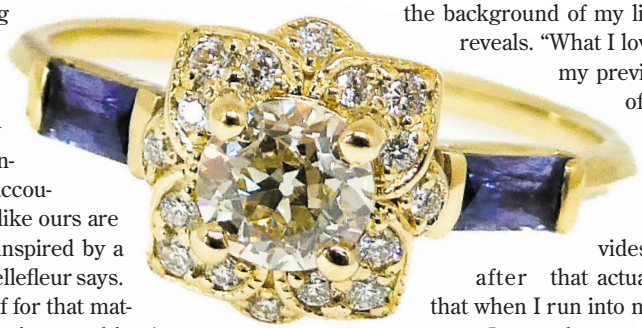
BY TERRANCE GRIEP | PHOTOS COURTESY OF JEN BELLEFLEUR

"'Thou shalt not' is soon forgotten, but 'Once upon a time' lasts forever." — Philip Pullman

The most told and re-told love stories—rescuer and rescued, curse and kiss, godless monster and fairy godmother—begin with a Once Upon a Time and end with Happily Ever After. The latter implies a relationship that will last…which might be best symbolized by something that's already lasted.

"Fine jewelry contains the oldest substances you'll ever touch," notes Jen Bellefleur. "Diamonds were formed billions of years ago, as were precious metals." Bellefleur knows a thing or three about the topic–not because she's billions of years old and therefore witnessed the formation of diamonds firsthand but because she co-owns the artisan jewelry studio, New Gild Jewelers in Minneapolis. There she plies her multi-faceted trade as an award-winning jeweler, designer, and artisan. Her skills are often focused on the forging of works meant to declare the most dedicated kind of love between exclusive couples. She continues: "For me, I think about the fact that diamonds were here before the dinosaurs, and then saw the rise of those great beasts and their extinction, and carried on until we found and loved them today."

This antediluvian character does not prevent the Here and the Now from holding some sway. "I strive to make commitment pieces as timeless in design as possible, but there are trends," Bellefleur reports. "Right now, rose gold and gemstone rings without diamonds are hot. Couples are wanting their experience around their rings to be as beautiful as the ring itself. Their love wasn't a cookie-cutter, rom-com kind of love….why should their rings be? Spoiler: they shouldn't."



According to Bellefleur, New Gild Jewelry offers not just empathic expertise, but an entirely different way of thinking about such accouterments. "Truly one-of-a-kind jewelry pieces like ours are tiny wearable works of art, whether they be inspired by a mosque or a flower or the Art Deco period," Bellefleur says. "Giving such a piece, or keeping it for yourself for that matter, is a gesture that honors what has been made sacred by time and love."

New Gild Jewelry is a one-stop shop, offering "one-of-a-kind jewelry for our gallery collections" for the less imaginative, "full-custom diamond and gemstone jewelry" for the more imaginative, along with antique renovation and jewelry repair. But love's lasting testimony remains Bellefleur's most abiding passion. "A well-designed commitment ring celebrates the individual, the union, and the preciousness of love itself," she insists. "I strive for that each and every time I sit down with clients."

Those tête-á-têtes are where the fancies of the client interact with the expertise of the jeweler. "Not every gemstone is suitable for commitment jewelry due to vast differences in durability," Bellefleur prescribes. "Nothing is harder and more durable than a diamond, and second to that, sapphire. While we would love to make emerald and opal jewelry from an aesthetic standpoint, we need to make these pieces durable for twenty-four/seven wear."

This discernment makes plain that her profession isn't just a job to Bellefleur—it's a calling. "I've been an artist in the background of my life since I was a child," Bellefleur reveals. "What I love most about jewelry is that all of my previous art has found roots in places of pain and trauma, whereas jewelry comes from a place that embraces a higher beauty and happiness."

Bellefleur's greatest ambition is to create work that provides each client with a happily ever after that actually lasts ever after. "I always say that when I run into my clients at Whole Foods in three years, I want them to run up and hug me," the jeweler moons. "I've played a small part in many beautiful love stories, and that means everything to me." ▮

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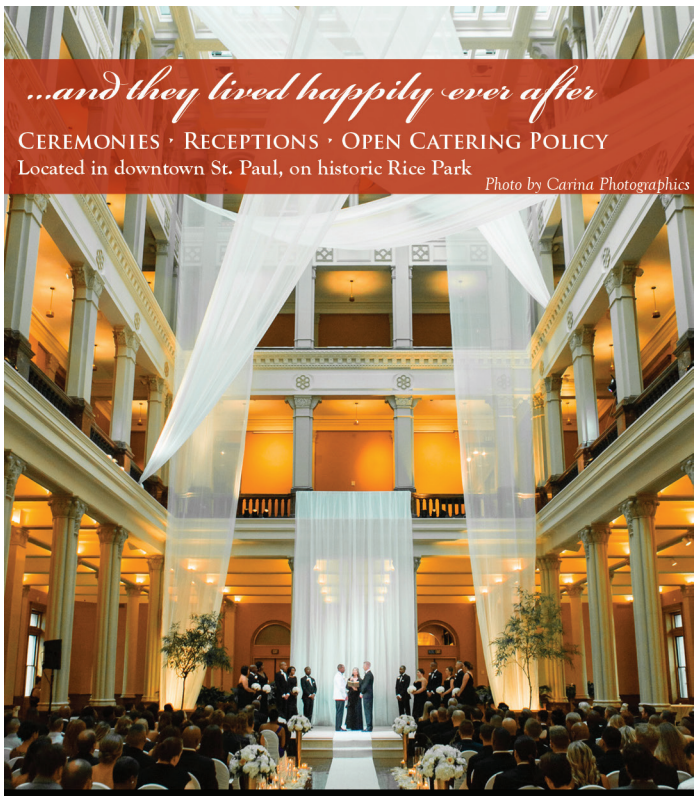

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Denny Jacobson

A Bright, Shining Light

BY ASHLEY BERNING | PHOTO BY ASHLEY BERNING

Denny Jacobson realized he was gay at a young age – five or six, he says – but in the 1950s, that wasn't something people talked about. Despite having a supportive mother, he was assaulted multiple times as a child, later struggled with substance abuse, and witnessed his friends dying of AIDS while the president wouldn't even acknowledge the crisis. Somehow, through these experiences, Denny has remained exceptionally positive, a firm believer in love and the goodness of humanity. Today you'll find him in the Stevens Square neighborhood, where he's lived for about fifteen years, doing his best to brighten everyone's day.

Denny has been with his husband, Daniel Jackson, for almost fifty years. "I met him in 1973 when I was about 22," he says. "I had told my gay friends, 'I'm tired of dating, I feel like a hoe.' So they introduced me to Daniel. Within a minute of meeting him, I knew he was special. There were, like, little sparkles around him and I was just overcome with 'Yes, this is the one.' I just knew it was him.

"The first three times I met him, he didn't want me sexually – not that he wasn't interested – but I made a point, and wanted to see how he was going to react. So we kind of dated, but I was still dating other people. After three or four years, I decided, 'What are we doing? Here is the person, who when I was 22, before I met him, I had prayed to God [for].' I had said, being religious, I want to meet someone who I can be with for the rest of my life. And it happened!

"So by the time I was 27, we had sealed our love and relationship, and it just got better and better. We could have been married in 1977 when I finally realized the relationship was what it was going to be." Officially, Denny and Daniel were married in 2013.

While they were falling in love in the seventies, Denny was also working on his own trauma healing. "In 1977 I went through a program – it was called Christopher Street, it was over on 22nd and Hennepin. It was a counseling place for gay people to go. Michael Roebuck was one of my counselors. They began talking about [AIDS]. They were saying gay men are dying in New York and Los Angeles, they're dropping dead. They called it the gay cancer.

By the early 1980s, Michael Roebuck [and several of my other friends] had all died of AIDS. It was really fast. Back then they didn't know what to do, so people were just dying. It was a very sad time."

AIDS now, of course, is manageable with the proper treatments, and the stigma has lessened. We as a community lost so many of our elders during that time. When asked if he had any advice for young LGBTQ people today, Denny sighed and said, "I don't know. Just be careful, because things right now are crazy, and they could get worse for GLBTQ people. You can't solve the hatred, so I think you do need to be careful, but if you can be out and be open, that's the best thing to do. Just keep watching what's going on in the world. Because people can change our rights, people could do that really easily coming up. I want us to band together and be as supportive as we can, and I mean to everybody, not just GLBTQ, but to everybody.

"I like being more positive, because the negative stuff can just drag you down. I always take those negative things and flick them up into the air, little boxes of icky stuff, just flick them up there and say goodbye. The one thing God's son says is, 'love one another as I have loved you.' Yeshua never said who! He just says to love one another – so that's everybody. That's how I look at it."

Wise words to live by.

Thank you, Denny, for being who you are, and for helping us do the same. ∎

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A Dream Deferred

Captain Nic Wiswell

BY ISAAC JOHNSON

We don't deserve the kindness and service of Captain Nic Wiswell of the Minnesota National Guard. She believes, "If you want somebody to get on your side and understand where you're coming from, then you have to go to them first." To understand the intensity of CPT Wiswell's resilience and unrelenting need to serve with civic engagement, you have to understand the patience it took to make a dream finally come true.

CPT Wiswell was born in a military hospital in Hawaii and grew up in a military family. Her father was a pediatrician in the army for 25 years. "It was great growing up," CPT Wiswell says, "there was always the sense of something outside of yourself and a sense of curiosity. Every place we went there was diversity in backgrounds and nationalities. That was something that from a very young age I was lucky enough to see."

She always wanted to join the military and "feels very strongly that one gender, one political party, one demographic, should not have a monopoly on patriotism or military service." However when Don't Ask Don't Tell was enacted it put a damper on her dreams. Her dream was deferred for 15 painstaking years until she enlisted the day after it was repealed. She chose the midwest as her adoptive home as one of the areas of the country she hadn't lived in yet and began her military career. Although there were a few bumps after the repeal, "I've always felt very supported by my leaders and had great mentors. There's never been a time where I felt excluded."

The appreciation for differences was instilled at a young age for CPT Wiswell so it's no wonder that after 10 years of service she is energized with passion. Passion for a sense of community among those that wear the same uniform, because, "we are not uniform, there is strength in all our differences and we need to leverage that." She is happy to report that there is now more awareness that the force only gets stronger though diverse perspectives.

"We have some people that come in because they want money for college, some people who have a family history, and we have some people who want to be part of something greater. None of those is more important than any other reason," says CPT Wiswell. Those perspectives she is all too familiar with as the Company Commander for HHC/334th Brigade Engineer Battalion and as MN NG Special Emphasis Program Manager in the State Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Positions that top off her impressive resume, supervising over a hundred soldiers and working with MN National Guard partners to promote inclusion. "If we all are thinking along the same lines and have the same background, we don't get a lot of innovation that way."

Photo courtesy of Nic Wiswell

She has learned that perception, visibility, and representation, are such important things. She reminds us to stay resilient, "Keep trying, keep pushing, I had a long period of time where I thought I wasn't going to be able to serve my country in this way, and just continuing to try, continuing to look for opportunities," finally made her dream a reality. She couldn't have gotten to where she is without the benefit of her relationships and advocating for mentorship. Finding those with wisdom to learn from and then passing it down. She is grateful for all the supportive mentors she has had and and proudly reports that the MN National Guard is pushing its leaders to find and mentor individuals who are different from them. "How can you lead somebody you don't know?", CPT Wiswell asks. "Keep looking out for mentors, because they are there."

She is an inspiration to silence your self doubt, "Let somebody else tell you no. Don't limit yourself, try and reach out for that new idea, and let people know what you're thinking. If it's something that can't happen or has to be reworked, let somebody else tell you that rather than being self limiting." For her resilience, the representation she provides, and the relationships she has fostered, not a more genuine thank you for your service could be said. ∎

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Tank Weekend

A Celebration of Leather and Kink Expression

BY STEVE LENIUS | PHOTOS BY ANDREW BERTKE/EVERETT ALLEN PHOTOGRAPHY

For many years The Saloon has welcomed the leather/BDSM/fetish communities to occasional "Tank" parties (lately the third Friday of each month). However, during the weekend of Friday through Sunday, February 18-20, the leather and kink communities took over the entirety of The Saloon during "Tank Weekend," a weekend-long celebration of leather and kink expression. Tank Weekend was sponsored by Twin Cities Leather and The Saloon, and was the first large local leather/BDSM/fetish community event held in the Twin Cities in 2022.

Tank Weekend took place during the weekend usually reserved for the Mr. Twin Cities Leather contest. The weekend's events included leather educational seminars, a community roundtable discussion, and two big-production shows Friday and Saturday evenings—but no contest. Well, no contest during Tank Weekend, anyway, but more about that later.

According to Karri Plowman of Twin Cities Leather, Tank Weekend was envisioned as a way "to mark the last two years for anyone who feels comfortable coming out to hold space." Rather than a competition event, Tank Weekend was a chance for the community to do some celebrating, and perhaps some healing. A promotional video posted on Facebook proclaimed, "Tank Weekend is for celebrating and healing our diverse kink and leather community. You are wanted here. This is our space. Let's share it together. Because our community is for everyone. Not just 'no matter who you are.' But because of who you are."

The weekend started Friday evening with a special-edition kinky drag show featuring performers from HOT PINK, the Saloon's twice-weekly drag show featuring all genders and all body types. The drag show was followed by a Tank party, with leather/fetishwear dress code enforced.

Saturday's events started out with a "Town Hall Gathering" and community roundtable discussion on Saturday afternoon. This was an opportunity for community members to vent, share, discuss, process, and hopefully start to heal by letting go of the challenges of the last few years. There was also discussion of how individuals, and Minnesota's leather/kink communities, can move forward.

Those attending the discussion were offered pens and brightly colored sheets of paper and were invited to write down things from the past two years that they wanted to let go. Because a bonfire or campfire would not be a good idea inside The Saloon, a paper shredding machine was at center stage. One by one, those who wanted to do so stood before the crowd, shared what they had written on their sheet of paper, and then fed the paper into the shredder as a way of leaving those things behind and moving forward.

The community roundtable discussion was followed by two educational presentations, "The Art of Negotiation: A Refresher" and "OK, I've got them tied up, now what?" Both sessions were presented by members of the Knights of Leather.

Saturday night's "Leather, Laughs, and Lashes" show was a mixture of performances by drag artists and by past Minnesota leather titleholders: Emerson Kellogg, Mr. Twin Cities Leather (TCL) 2016; Kurt Patton, Mr. TCL 2019; Ren Rushold, Mr. Minneapolis Eagle 2015; Lex Patton, Mr. TCL 2015; and Ash, the current Mr. TCL 2020. The show was followed by

the second Tank party of the weekend.

The weekend's final events were a Sunday brunch, in keeping with the tradition set by the Mr. TCL contest, and The Saloon's Sunday-evening shower contest.

Bootblacks were available at Tank Weekend events both Friday night (Sage Leigh) and Saturday (Bootblack Paul). A leather/fetish dress code was enforced for the two Tank parties, and masks and vaccinations were required for all the weekend's events.

Clubs with members attending Tank Weekend events included Atons of Minneapolis, Knights of Leather, Twin Cities T Rexx, Twin Cities Sirens, and Twin Cities Spectrum. In addition, Tank Weekend attracted some out-of-town visitors, including some visiting leather titleholders.

An announcement was made on Saturday evening during the "Leather, Laughs, and Lashes" show that the Mr. TCL contest, which traditionally has been held in mid-February, in the future will be held during the fourth weekend in September (when the weather is better). That means the next Mr. TCL contest will be held the weekend of Sept. 23-25, 2022. That's the weekend after the Atons of Minneapolis hold their 50th-anniversary run (Sept. 16-18). Out-of-towners might want to plan an extended trip to the Twin Cities at that time to experience both events. ∎

OUR AFFAIRS | BOOKS

ALL BOYS AREN'T BLUE: A MEMOIR MANIFESTO

George M. Johnson
Farrar Straus Giroux
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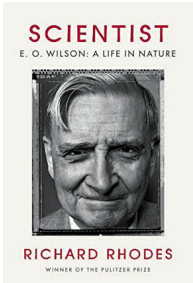
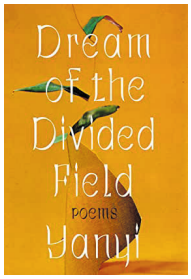
Johnson's *"Manifesto"* is more a guide for young, Black, gay males navigating the turbulent waters of American society. Board of education book-banners may balk at the sassy cover art, but Johnson's personal essays simply map his growing up black and queer in New Jersey and Virginia. Despite the sometimes dangerous path confronting the young Johnson, he was fortunate in having had a loving family; brothers, cousins, matriarch Nanny and uncles, aunts, cousins–including the transgender Hope. Yes, there is "language" yes, there is explicit material, but presented as information needed for the reader to know to show by personal experience that the only way to live is to be oneself, that the best way to do that is to acquire tools to achieve their personhood.



SCIENTIST: E. O. WILSON: A LIFE IN NATURE

Richard Rhodes
Doubleday
$30

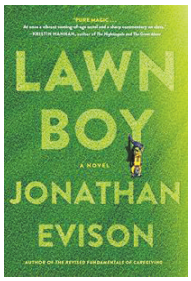
From boyhood onward, Edward Osborne Wilson (1929-2021) was a naturalist. One eye blinded in a fishing accident, the boy began to concentrate on creatures small enough to hold close for examination: ants. At thirteen, he was the first to recognize the invasion of fire ants in his native Alabama. He not only became the foremost myrmecologist, but a great synthesizer, writing about the relation within and between species, eventually moving on to become a Harvard professor and ecological activist in an effort to save Earth's ecosystems and creatures now becoming extinct at the rate of a species a day. Prominent among his thirty books (and some 500 articles) are the 1977 *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *On Human Nature and The Ants*.



DREAM OF THE DIVIDED FIELD

Yanyi
One World
$16

Currently poetry editor at Foundry, author of *The Year of Blue Water*, and winner of the 2018 Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize, Yani, in this poetry collection explores the body as one of many homes we have entered and left before, yet never lost or discarded. Human lives are stages in an ongoing liminality that never deserts us and ceaselessly offers polarities of joy and suffering, love and loneliness, ever seeking the solace of home. Memory is the bark for these never-ending voyages, both for what is behind, and what lies ahead. Past, present, future meld. A fragment from "Landscape with a Hundred Turns:" *"When you turned into a hundred rooms, / I returned each month as a door / that opened only one."*



LAWN BOY

Jonathan Evison
Algonquin
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When 20-something yard-worker Mike Muñoz is fired after refusing to pick up a client's St. Bernard's excrement, he's back home in his mother's double-wide caring for his disabled older sibling. He loves landscaping, dreams of writing the "Great American Landscaping" novel, and wants a girlfriend. Maybe a boyfriend? What happened to the American Dream? Can it be dreamed by one and all? Even by a half-Mexican member of the working poor? A talented landscaper and topiarist, Mike's unacknowledged except by a few whiter, richer con artists attempting to use him for their own purposes;"… you don't look too Mexican, that's the important thing." Mike takes solace in the library, in reading, and finds a worthy friend. Evison's semi-autobiographical fifth novel bursts with anger, humor, and hope.

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Racing Pride Expands to North America

BY RANDY STERN

Zandara Kennedy. Photo courtesy of Racing Pride

Auto racing is not exactly the "final frontier" when it comes to bridging its athletes with the LGBTQ community.

Recently, there was some news of some race drivers and other motorsport athletes who have come out as LGBTQ. These bits of news have brought us to the point where there is now a place where everyone can support each other. Not just professional racing athletes, but all of us.

That lead to the formation of an organization called Racing Pride. Earlier this year, the organization announced that they have expanded to North America. As part of this expansion, Racing Pride's organizers also announced a lineup of ambassadors and partners to help promote and create a community in the U.S.A. and Canada.

Racing Pride began in the United Kingdom in 2019 "to create visible role-models and support for the [LGBTQ] community within the sport, as well as to offer education around allyship," according to their website. The organization has grown to welcome key partners, such as the Aston Martin Cognizant Formula One team.

"I am extremely excited that Racing Pride has been able to launch in North America," says Dr. Richard Morris, the Co-Founder and Director of Partner Relations at Racing Pride. "We have a magnificent group of ambassadors spanning NASCAR, drift, drag and road racing, as well as some brilliant and enthusiastic partners, and so far the reception has been overwhelmingly positive.

"I don't underestimate the scale of the work ahead if we're to have the impact we want to," continues Morris, "but I hope that this launch and the actions we're going to take across this year and beyond will inspire members of the [LGBTQ] community in North America to believe that they can, and do, belong in motorsports."

With its expansion into North America, Racing Pride have added similar organizations, such as Athlete Ally and You Can Play to their partnership roster. Both organizations serve a similar function in bridging LGBTQ athletes across professional and amateur sports to the community.

Other global partners include FCPEuro, Gridlife, the British Racing & Sports Car Club, the 750 Club, British Automobile Racing Club, Out Motorsports, Brooklands Museum, British Universities Karting Championship, Sports Media LGBT+, Formula Student, Navigate Partners, and Vroom Media.

This organization already has a field of ambassadors in North America representing various forms of motorsports. In North America, those ambassadors include NHRA racer Travis Shumake, touring car racer Tom O'Gorman, NASCAR racer Devon Rouse, ARCA racer Zach Herrin, and stunt driver/drift racer Zandara Kennedy.

In the United Kingdom, Racing Pride has already participated in several shows and events, where their ambassadors have either spoken or made appearances on the organization's behalf.

"I thought I was the only gay race car driver," says Shumake, "and now I know there's a lot more. And I know that there's the opportunity to create space for other drivers to be comfortable, or to either join the sport or be more comfortable being themselves and authentic."

Shumake continues: "But certainly has been a tenfold increase for me in the past year of at least knowledge. And, I think that's what's so important of representation is having a platform and a voice like we're getting with Racing Pride to let people see us as a group, as not just a one-off anomaly in our particular sport."

For other Racing Pride Ambassadors, it is an opportunity to become beacons for our community across many platforms. "Being a Racing Pride ambassador is huge," says O'Gorman. "I began racing before I came out. Racing was an instrumental piece of the puzzle to me becoming who I am, and there's no way I'm the only one with that experience."

O'Gorman continues: "If I can be a reference point for someone else to feel as empowered and safe as I have within motorsports—or any less-traditionally LGBTQ+ industry/community, for that matter—then I've paid it forward and done my job. I've wanted to do something like this for many years now but was never sure how to make an impact doing it on my own. Having an organization like Racing Pride, and as a byproduct their partners, etc., to help amplify the impact we can make is very exciting."

We look forward to seeing what comes next for Racing Pride here in the U.S.A. If you're a fan of auto racing, go support these athletes! Follow their social media channels. You might want to catch them in action on the track! ∎

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